Living Generously

Generous	With	How	We'	re
Perceived				

SESSION GOALS

The point of every session is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: To bring God's Kingdom in our communities involves being less invested in how we'll be perceived by others.

Head Change: To know that being generous with how people perceive us takes courage, determination, resilience, and a willingness to be misunderstood and unfairly criticised.

Heart Change: To feel grateful that our love for Jesus can swamp any concern over what others think about us.

Life Change: To live out our faith, happy to be unpopular for showing world-changing love to others.

OPEN

Which three adjectives do you think each of the following people would use to describe you: your spouse, one of your kids, your parents, a friend at church, a non-Christian colleague, and one of your neighbours?

We are perceived differently by different people, and we can't always control these perceptions. In this session, Jonathan shows us that we can choose to live generously when it comes to how others perceive us. That means, we can let go of our fear of rejection and instead wholeheartedly embraced a life of unashamed faith in Jesus and compassion for the people He has given us to love.

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VIEW	
As you watch, write down how Jonathan answers these questions.	
Why does Jonathan find it difficult to live generously in this area?	
Which strict social norms does Mary violate?	
How does Jesus respond to her contraventions?	
Show SESSION #6: Generous With How We're Perceived (8 minutes)	

Reader

Jonathan opens the session by confessing that he struggles with this aspect of generosity because he likes to be liked. He doesn't want to rock the boat in any way. Does this resonate with you? Why, or why not? Are you generally ok with others' disapproval, or do you avoid it at all costs?

Sometimes, like Mary, we need to be willing to be misunderstood and unfairly criticised, to have our motives questioned, to be wrongly perceived, or to be judged for doing something we believe to be right. Is what others think important? Is it the *most* important thing? If you're ok to talk about it, describe a time when you were particularly unpopular because of the compassionate stance you took.

In Luke 10 we read that Mary sits at Jesus' feet. This indicates she considers herself His disciple, except, only men could be disciples. For the men present, her outlandish, culturally offensive behaviour only gets worse when she anoints Jesus' feet, uncovers her hair, and takes on the position of a servant by wiping His feet. And then of course her wastefulness is severely criticised because the perfume is so expensive. When last did someone shock you with their culturally offensive, yet undeniably compassionate, behaviour? When last were you the one behaving shockingly? Who stands out to you as someone who embodies guts and grit along with tenderness and compassion? What can you begin doing, tomorrow, to emulate their attitudes and actions?

Mary believes her radical, loving intervention is the right thing to do, even though she receives hostility and criticism for it. Her love for Christ swamps any concern over how others perceive what she has done. She can be generous with how people perceive her because it's irrelevant when compared to the opportunity she has to express her love for Jesus. How important is your reputation to you? What would it take for you to surrender it gladly to God? For what cause would you be happy to get egg on your face?

Jesus is highly protective of Mary when the disciples criticise her, telling them in no uncertain terms to back off (John 12:7) and explaining that Mary has anointed His body for burial, in an attempt to get His friends to understand the moment's significance. Is it reasonable for us to expect people always to understand what we

do and why we do it? Is it worth explaining in the hope that they will? Why, or why not?	
Astonishingly, Jesus mirrors and reinforces Mary's provocative behaviour in the next chapter, by stooping to wash His disciples' feet and commanding them to love one another in this same way (John 13:5–15). Who in your church is courageously 'washing feet' in the wider community? How can you encourage them by endorsing their actions?	
Jonathan says, 'The willingness to be misunderstood, to turn accepted norms on their head, to bring the Kingdom of God into a world that does not know or recognise it – this is all part of being generous with how people perceive us. It's about acting out the faith we believe in.' Why was Jesus willing to be misunderstood	
and rejected? Why are you willing to be misunderstood and rejected? If you created a personal pie chart made up of three slices labelled	
peacemaker, troublemaker, and people-pleaser, what percentage of the whole would each slice represent?	
How is God prompting you to live out your faith this week?	

BIBLE EXPLORATION

In Matthew 10:22, Jesus says, 'And all nations will hate you because you are My followers. But everyone who endures to the end will be saved.' How would you explain this verse to your teenage son or daughter in such a way that it doesn't terrify or demoralise them, but rather prepares them and gives them a perspective of hope and expectation?

After washing His disciples' feet, Jesus says, 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples...' (John 13:34–35) **Do your neighbours and co-workers know you're a Christian? Why, or why not?**

Paul writes, 'The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction! But we who are being saved know it is the very power of God.' (1 Corinthians 1:18) Has anyone ever called you foolish for throwing yourself into an outreach programme abroad, or giving away your resources to the church, or volunteering to spend time just listening to the stories of refugees? What did you do with the criticism?

Read Philippians 3:5–11. What evidence is there that, for many years, Paul prized his reputation above all else? What changed that? If you've turned your measurable successes into idols, what's your next step?

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LAST WORD

We're here to bring God's Kingdom to our communities, and that often involves doing things differently. Jesus acknowledges this when He says, 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account.' (Matthew 5:11) Mary embraced this truth, showing selfless generosity with how people perceived her as she loved on Jesus. Her brave example has inspired believers for thousands of years. Being generous with how people perceive us may not be instantly recognisable as a kind of generosity, but it's a powerful way of expressing our faith in a loving, generous God. It will take courage, determination, and resilience, and we may be treated unfairly. Thankfully, however, our love for God can overwhelm any reluctance to be criticised or misperceived, enabling our love to be meaningfully experienced by those around us.

DEEPER WALK

Select at least one activity below to complete before watching the next session.

Read: Mediate on Psalm 37:7 and consider how it might help you to be generous with how others perceive you: 'Be still in the presence of the Lord and wait patiently for Him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes.' What makes you restless? Be still. Are you hoping God will defend your efforts and reputation? Wait patiently for Him to act. Whose antagonism is rubbing you up the wrong way? Don't worry and fret.

Write: Jot down the names of all the people whose opinions mean a lot to you. Put an asterisk next to a name if you know that person's opinion is likely to stop you from showing bold compassion in your circle of influence. What would it take to remove the asterisk? Write down any ideas that come to mind.

Pray: Galatians 1:10 reads, 'Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant.' Use this verse as a prayer prompt, praying it back to God: Help me not to want to win the approval of people, but of You, God. I don't want pleasing people to be my goal because I'm serving You, Jesus, not them.

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